TEACHING ENGLISH

A magazine devoted to the Teaching of the English Language in India

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EDITORIAL

WE have given a good deal of attention, in this periodical, to the careful arranging of language material for teaching; we have advocated the grading of structural items of language in order of difficulty or convenience; we have suggested the grading of vocabulary according to usefulness and frequency; we have pointed out that difficulty, usefulness and convenience cannot always be determined in advance, though frequency can, and the teacher must, therefore, hold himself free to improvise and modify his mode and order of presentation to the circumstances of his class and its environment. We have also pointed out that consideration of what we are to present has little or no value unless we consider, also, how we are to present it: as little value as the collecting of fruit without stopping to consider whether we have a basket to hold it. A great many difficulties in the presentation of language material are only difficulties if the manner of presentation is unsuitable or not compelling enough, or if there is no social or psychological justification or necessity for the form we are teaching at the moment at which we are trying to teach it. Unfortunately, although a great deal of work has been done on the linguistic and phonetic analysis of languages, we are still fundamentally in ignorance of how language is learnt; a great deal of work remains to be done on the psychology of language learning and perception. Dogmatism as to how language is to be taught is out of place until this has been done.

In the meantime, however, more of the background to language learning can be illumined by the psychologist than is sometimes realized, and careful consideration of what we do know about the mind, and how it absorbs knowledge and skill, can direct our attention towards fruitful ways of working and away from unfruitful ones, towards the basket which is there and away from the one which is not.

For this reason we have asked Professor A. S. Narayana Pillai, Professor of Psychology, University College, Trivandrum, to reproduce the gist of a dialogue which he held with Mr. Billows, of the British Council, in front of an audience of university professors and lecturers, during a recent conference on methods of teaching English in the university. We have also included the text of a broadcast by Dr. Wilder Penfield, the famous Montreal neurologist, which he made from the Delhi Radio Station during his visit to India last winter.

For the same reason and in the same way we welcome *the contribution of Miss Joyce Peel on the practical problems* of school drama. There is certainly no shortage of enthusiasm for drama in schools and colleges in India, but teachers do not always realize the value of home-produced and even spontaneous drama in helping with the presentation of texts and in promoting expression, both spontaneous and prepared; nor do they realize that useful and effective dramatic work is within the reach of all. It is to be hoped that this very interesting presentation of the subject which has been divided into several parts, to be spread over two or three numbers, will encourage many teachers to try the possibilities of drama as a means to present language in a natural and compelling setting. At the same time we are glad to *review in our pages three pamphlets* published by the Ministry of Education in Delhi, one of which "Integrated Courses in Social Studies" by R. D. Bramwell, who visited India last year *and conducted* courses in Madras, Bombay and Delhi, is of particular interest to teachers of English. Through projects and local studies whether carried out in the home language or *in English, the pupil* is naturally brought face to face with the need to consult works of reference and publicity material for firms written in English, moreover he can be brought to discuss the work in English and give short 2 or 3 minute talks on his investigations, so that expression is stimulated.

As the *basis of the English course* is widened to include all that interests the pupil, and as it opens up on every side possibilities for wider reading and access to valuable knowledge that may bring professional competence and contact with a wider community than the local one, the pupil may be expected to value his second language and enjoy *his competence in it.* Then the problem of fitting the material to the pupil will be solved; he will take over the process himself.

NOTE :—*Reviews* are replacing *Tools of the Trade* and *Question Box* in this issue.

PSYCHOLOGY FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

A dialogue between Mr. F. L. Billows (British Council, Madras) and Dr. A. S. N. Pillai (Professor of Psychology, University College, Trivandrum) held at University College, Trivandrum, in May 1957.

B. The psychological processes of *learning and understanding* are the background and condition of the teacher's task. The teacher of a language, in particular, should know the nature of the material he is working in, the human mind. Perhaps, most of the difficulties encountered by a young lecturer in English in our college classes spring from the lack of adequate knowledge in this field. What do you say, Dr. Pillai?

P. I agree, and I am glad that in this seminar an attempt is being made to help our teachers to realise this. Language teachers should benefit from an understanding—even if it is incomplete—of the psychology of the learning situation.

B. Can you point out some of the important facts that have to be kept in mind?

P. Well, it's rather difficult to number them straight away and in any case that will not help. What I should like to do is to indicate at least *four* classes of facts which are significant in a learning situation such as we have in a college class.

B. What are these?

P. Teachers are usually more concerned with the *giving* of facts, and have little concern with the *receiving* mind. We prepare our lessons, arrange our points, and so on, and impart these to the pupils. Do we ask ourselves how the pupils can receive?

The first thing to remember is that there are limits to the receptivity of the minds which are before us—general limits and special limits. These limits are frequently ignored. For example, all perception, i.e. understanding of relations and meaning, follows certain laws. The law of apperception is one law of perception. *Any fact becomes meaningful only in relation to the background of facts that are already in our minds.* This, of course, looks simple but its full implications are not usually realised.

Not merely that the description of the fact gets more meaningful as our background becomes wider but the *very* meaning of the description changes with the background. Change the background, the meaning changes. There is no fixed meaning in all contexts.

B. Can you give an example?
P. Yes. Let us take an illustration given by Stagner. Supposing I give a list of words:

Alcohol, Glass, Noise, Men in white coats.

What is the kind of picture that you build up?

Of a bar—with the men in white coats as waiters, the alcohol being sipped in glasses: the noise of conversation and so on. This is the significance of each of these words. Then I add the word, *Cat.* You may fit the cat into the picture, perhaps as wandering around the legs of the customers.

Now, add three more words:

Bunsen burner, Microscope, Dissecting set.

What happens? The whole picture changes. It is now perhaps a scientific laboratory, the men in white coats research scientists or physicians, the alcohol, used in sterilising or preserving specimens, the glass, beaker and test-tube and so on.

What a change in the picture? The elements are changed—transformed. The whole determines the parts—in perception.
B. That seems clear but how does it enter the teaching situation?
P. In many ways. For instance, if the teacher wants the pupil to get the particular meaning or significance of a "phrase" or a "word" he could help by giving even *at the start* the total picture. He can avoid the confusion, the possible shifts of meaning or even shifts of standpoints by presenting the whole. The parts will just click. It will save time in the long run and save energy; it will help teaching and learning.

But this is only one aspect—that of perception. I must leave several others and go on to another—the second class of facts which are psychologically significant. These are the facts of memory.
B. Yes: remembering is quite an important process—in all aspects of life, and in academic pursuits particularly.
P. Let me give a few simple facts: memory is really composed of four processes: receiving impressions, retaining, recalling and recognising. In receiving impressions we should be attentive, alive to meanings and relationships. Meaningful material is remembered easily. The point, therefore, is to make the material before us more meaningful. We could do that by taking more active interest in the material. The trouble, usually, is that we don't take interest and then complain that we have poor memory for faces, for numbers, for facts and so on.

Retention is a physiological process. "A sound memory in a sound body" is the rule here.

Recall is a separate process. Retention does not guarantee recall. It is failure to recall that is often regarded as poor

memory. But recall is only one of the "part-processes" of memory, though, perhaps an important part. Recall may be blocked by the individual having an emotional experience at the time. Witness the boy who has prepared his school-day speech well and then forgets it at the needed moment. Stage-fright and "nerves" are all emotional experiences which hinder recall. The remedy, therefore, is to avoid emotional excitement. This is general advice. How it is to be done in any particular case has to be decided by the individual according to the circumstances.

Recognition, of course, is just there or it is not there. It cannot be controlled to any extent.

Pupils should be encouraged to trust their memory. Trusting your memory is always better than having a nervous apprehension that it is going to fail you.

B. Yes, that is very good advice in language learning. The habit of writing down a word with its meaning as soon as we meet it, results in a relaxation of tension and postpones to another day the effort of trying to hold the word in the memory. If there is no pencil or paper at hand, we are forced to make a strong effort to retain the word in our minds, and this effort helps us to remember the word. I'm glad you've mentioned that. Shall we pass on to the third class of facts?

P. The third class refers to words as tools. You must have something to say on this. You use them much more than I do!

B. Yes, it seems to me that concentration on the word as an entity for itself, as if it had a separate existence, apart from what it is designed to bring to mind, is as useless as thinking about and gazing at a spade or a saw or an axe, but not using it. The qualities of an axe are experienced and realized in the chopping of wood, nothing but using the axe can possibly give us skill in its use or that confident affection that we have towards a much-used, reliable tool.

P. I agree entirely. What I want to emphasize next is the *part played by imagery* in acquiring this skill. Images are pictures in the mind. These pictures must be painted vividly in a learning situation. It is the task of the teacher to do this. Ability to do this marks one out as an able teacher. Most persons are "visual", i.e. they have vivid visual images. Some have clear "auditory" images. To strengthen both should be the aim of the educator. To make use of both in a learning situation is of the utmost help to a language teacher.

B. Yes, that brings us back to the question of our first encounters with new words and expressions. We can never expect to train our capacity for forming clear and memorable auditory images if we never have the opportunity to meet words for the first time

in speech and if we seldom force our auditory memories to hold the echoes of words in our heads long enough for us to remember them. But, as you say, we must *try to strengthen both*, and for training the capacity of the mind for forming visual images I recommend as much intelligent copying as possible, that is, of course, the writing of manipulative exercises which require the copying of most of the sentence but the modification of one or two words, or the adapting by a pupil to his personal situation of sentences which are true for one member of the class only. The other kind of visual image, the pictorial image, can be brought before the pupil and can stimulate his imagination and develop his power of imaging by the teacher frequently illustrating what he is teaching by drawing on the blackboard or using pictures as much as possible in the class-room.

P. Now I come to the fourth class, facts of attention. The problem of attracting attention is different from that of holding attention.

Attracting attention is, perhaps, easy. Loud noise or a striking pose may immediately attract attention. But that is not usually the problem for the college teacher. The problem is, after attracting attention, how to hold it?

Some facts that have to be kept in mind are the importance of bodily adjustment, the shifting nature of attention, the effect of intensity, contrast and novelty, the part played by movement and change. That attention involves bodily adjustment is an elementary but often forgotten fact. Watch an audience absorbed in a dramatic performance. Note their posture, the position of the faces, the direction of their eyes and so on. These muscular and other adjustments involve a strain. This strain must be relieved occasionally: we should not tax our pupils' attention. Apart from ensuring that they are comfortably seated and that the furniture etc. is of the desired pattern, we should give "breaks" and see that the pupils are relieved of long stretches of concentrated attention. The other factors also should be constantly kept in mind and the lessons so arranged as to get the maximum benefit of these factors. A little care and thought will help in evolving suitable techniques for use in each individual situation.

Above all, it should be remembered that voluntary attention depends ultimately on interest. If a person is hunting for a job, even a little "wanted" advertisement catches and holds his attention. There may be other things in the paper, more attractively displayed, set in bigger types and so on, but they do not attract his attention. The "ad" may be printed in small type, it may be in a corner of the paper: all factors may be against it but it will catch the eye. And it will be carefully read.

To hold attention by creating interest should be the aim of the teacher. To be able to do it is the mark of the best teacher.

B. Well, thank you very much Dr. Pillai; I think you have made these important points very clear, and I hope you have stimulated our hearers to further reading in this interesting field.

THE ART OF PLAY WRITING

BY MISS JOYCE M. PEEL

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Part I

Choosing a Theme

"What are we to do this year?" Such is the cry of many a desperate English teacher. There is in India today a great need for plays. Every school and college puts on at least one major entertainment a year which usually includes an English item, and producers are hard put to it to find suitable material. We cannot live for ever on scenes from Shakespeare; we must learn to create something new, and something that is relevant to the Indian situation.

A great transformation has been coming over Indian society. New ideas and situations are creating new problems which must be honestly faced and bravely met. These problems may be political and economic, or social and cultural, but ultimately they are all human problems. Yet individuals often feel helpless because of their gigantic and complex nature, and they are tempted to contract out of personal responsibility, saying that there is nothing they can do. The Bible warns us that without vision the people perish and the vision we need so badly today is just this creative response of faith in difficult human situations.

What has all this got to do with the entertainment problem and what have either to do with our work as teachers of English?

First, these articles are a plea that we should start trying to write our own plays. The need for plays is there. Who else is going to do it if we don't? How do we know we can't write, if we have not tried? How are future playwrights to spring up if we do not encourage students to write? We have at least three advantages over the outside playwright. We know who our actors will be and can write parts to suit them. We know who our audience will be and can cater to their taste, and we know the limitations of our stage!

Writing plays is a very good method of teaching English. It

is interesting for it stimulates the imagination and draws out initiative, which is what is so badly needed. This is no conversation for conversation's sake. Here is a project which can link on to the teaching of social studies and on to our classes of scripture or moral instruction. Very likely no great dramatic masterpiece will be achieved then and there, but perhaps the ambition to write may have been fired. Besides this, when people start trying to write plays themselves they soon discover the technical problems involved, and they will learn to have a far deeper respect for Shakespeare to whom they will turn as a master craftsman from whom they can learn. How rarely is Shakespeare studied from this most practical angle.

Every Art has its own discipline and technique, and every craftsman must learn to handle the tools of his trade. It is not enough to turn a story into dialogue. The result of that is a shapeless muddle of scenes succeeding endless scenes. It is technique that enables us to construct a plot that will grip the audience from start to finish, and convey the point of the story clearly and put it over with a "punch". These articles are an attempt to lay bare some of the bones of this technique, so that we can proceed with our venture in writing with more confidence. But technique is not enough. We must have something to say. We can choose a story from History or from a novel, or we can invent one of our own, but whatever it is, it must be fresh, it must become part of us. The more we are aware of the conflicts and struggles taking place within our society, the deeper we can go in the sympathetic understanding of other people, the better we shall be able to write.

We need to write about what we know, and we also should have a particular audience in view. A play suitable for a village will not be suitable in a town. A play for children will be different from that written for adults. We must interest the audience and the better we know its thoughts and emotions the more effective we can be.

One of the most important sides of playwriting is the delineation of character. It is character that creates the real interest of the play. It is something we can all understand, for we are all different compounds of the same basic ingredients. Thus we may write about a king, but because he is a man his problems will not lie entirely outside the experience of ordinary people. We can enter into his fears and jealousies and ambitions and so identify ourselves with him. It is just this identification that arouses emotion in the audience and will grip the attention. The more a character is brought to life with all its complex individuality, the more this identification will take place.

So let us start with the imagining of a character. Let us get to know him almost as well as we know ourselves. Let him really come alive. And then let us put him into a dramatic and challenging situation, and see what he does. There is always the temptation to invent a situation first and then invent a character to fit into it. The danger here is that such characters find it very hard to come alive, and if they do, they have a habit of refusing to fit meekly into the situation and of striking out on a path of their own to the ruination of the original plot. Having found a character and a situation, we must then start up the action. The word "Drama" means action, and but there is always a tendency for Drama to get bogged down in talk. Things must happen and as far as possible they must happen on the stage. Very few actions gain by being reported.

Action however does not always have to be physical. A man making a critical decision is doing something quite as dramatic as stealing jewels or murdering his wife. A play needs plenty of both mental and physical action, but a play designed for a village audience will probably need more physical action than that designed for a sophisticated audience more interested in problems of the mind.

Not all action is dramatic. I can clean my teeth or go for a walk and there is no dramatic interest involved. It is conflict that makes the action dramatic, conflict heightened by contrast. Here for instance are four intensely dramatic situations.

1. A conflict between two contrasting individuals or groups, as for instance in *Julius Caesar*. A more complex form of this situation is where a man is being pulled in opposite directions by two different sorts of people. The Bible story of King Ahab, torn between Elijah the prophet and Jezebel the queen would be an exciting theme to develop.

2. The struggle of a character against a mounting series of obstacles. The love of Romeo and Juliet is an illustration of this. The obstacles can consist of people or of impersonal forces, or both. In this kind of play the bigger the obstacle the more dramatic the plot.

3. A situation which forces an individual to make an important choice or decision. This is the theme of *Hamlet*.

4. A situation in which a character is brought face to face with the crisis of his life. A dramatisation of the Bible account of St. Paul's conversion would illustrate this type of play.

In all these situations the playwright needs to strive after simplicity. Initially there are two ways in which this simplicity should be shown. The first lies in the selection of characters. It is best to have only one chief character, or at the most two.

The chief character is called the protagonist, and the "leader of the opposition" is called the antagonist. These two need to be as sharply contrasted as possible. Then each of them needs a "confidant". This is someone to whom he can speak his innermost thoughts freely. There should be plenty of contrast between the chief character and the confidant, as in the case of Hamlet and Horatio. After this a minimum of characters should be selected. There should be just enough to tell the story, and to bring out the various sides of the chief characters. Every character should have an essential part to play.

The other form of simplicity lies in the selection of the theme. The theme is what the play is really about and should be able to be summed up in a few words, such as "the futility of ambition" or "the triumph of the power of love" etc etc. It is important to select one theme only. One story could illustrate several themes, but only one should be chosen, and all incidents and characters which fail to clarify it should be cut out. This may seem a ruthless policy, but it is the price that must be paid for the concentration and intensity that provides this necessary "punch".

One last thing may be added with regard to the selection of a story. It must grip you. If it doesn't grip the playwright it will never grip the audience to get excited about it. Feel it is important. Only then will it be possible to carry through to the end a task which is so much more difficult than most people imagine; a task which is deeply satisfying and crying out to be done.

Suggested Preliminary Work

1. Think out stories and themes suitable for different kinds of audiences.
2. Think out some dramatic situations illustrating concrete human problems.
3. Write out a story you would like to dramatise. Try and confine it to about 100 words.
4. Decide on the theme of the story. Do all the incidents, clarify it?
5. Make a list of characters, name them, and write a character sketch of the protagonist and antagonist.
6. Choose a title. *N.B.* A title should indicate the theme and also arouse curiosity.

Part II

From Story to Plot

A plot is a story so shaped that it will go on to a stage. Some stories will turn themselves into a plot quite easily, but some

resist the process and give the poor playwright every kind of headache.

There is a big difference between writing a novel and writing a play and when this difference is made clear, we can select the material that best suits the medium we have chosen.

One difference is that a novel can take plenty of time. The reader can put it down when he is tired of it, or has other things to do, and can continue at leisure to read it in instalments over a period of weeks. But a play has to be packed into a couple of hours or so, and must grip the attention of the audience from start to finish. A dull passage in a book can be skipped and forgotten: a dull moment in a play can kill it stone-dead.

Another difference is that in a novel frontiers of space and time can easily be skipped. We can travel from London to Cairo, from the whirr of a factory or circus, to the lonely heights of Everest, all in the space of a few lines in a page. We can jump half an hour and half a century with equal ease. We can even jump to the moon. But the four walls of the theatre make this impossible. Not only does every change of scene create problems for the Stage Manager, which can usually only be solved at considerable expense, but every fall of the curtain acts as an interruption that breaks the illusion of reality.

All this means that the playwright must eliminate and condense. He must eliminate all that is not essential to the plot, all that is not capable of gripping the attention, and he must concentrate into a few scenes the material gathered out of many.

The first thing to do is to decide how many scenes to have. This will depend partly upon the needs of the play itself, and partly upon the local tradition with regard to this. For instance the present tradition in the West favours a play in three or four Acts which may be divided into one or two scenes. The advantage of this is that there is a minimum of disturbance, and the author has time to work up towards a strongly emotional scene. The short interval between the Acts is a concession to human weakness—the need for a drink perhaps—a recognition that attention cannot be held without interruption for more than a certain length of time. The disadvantage of such a practice is that a great deal of action has to be eliminated, and there is little variety. It is a form suitable to plays depending upon primarily intellectual and psychological interest.

Indian plays on the other hand usually have a large number of scenes. This makes for variety and action, but it does tend to turn the drama into a variety show, and makes emotional sequence and characterisation difficult. The continual fall of the curtain is a disturbance.

Perhaps Shakespeare's plays, as they are produced today, might form a good model for plays here in India today. His plays are divided into a few Acts each with a clearly marked character. These Acts are divided into several scenes, giving plenty of contrast and action, but because of the planning of the stage, and the absence of complicated scenery no fall of the curtain is necessary. If some small article such as a throne has to be removed the lights are cut and it is taken off by a page. Different scenes can be played on different parts of the stage.

There is also Entr'act, which involves the momentary falling of the curtain simply to indicate the passage of time. There is no change of scene, no turning on of the auditorium lights, and interruption is cut down to the minimum.

There are various methods of condensing the story. There is the obvious one of cutting out all incidents that are not essential to the clarification of the story or the theme. Then events that cannot be shown on the stage can be described. This is a method that has to be used both sparingly and skilfully. Too much narration is dull, but there are certain tricks of the trade that can make a little of it dramatically effective. But more of this anon.

A much more effective method is to put the essence of one scene into another. For instance a quarrel may play an important part in the story but there may be no time for a scene specially devoted to it. The effect of the quarrel however can easily be shown in a later scene, and this can be even more effective than the quarrel itself.

One other method is that of transposition, that is making two incidents that happened at different times and in different places happen at the same time and place. How far this method can be used is a matter of opinion, but some use of it is almost unavoidable. Having selected the incidents that we are going to use, we now have to arrange them in the order most calculated to arouse tension. The success or failure of a play depends upon tension more than any other single factor. Tension is the straining forward of the audience's interest. From the moment the curtain rises the audience must be in a continual state of wanting to know what is going to happen next. This interest is created in many ways but the most important is suspense. If the tension is lost the attention will also be lost, and once lost it is almost impossible to revive.

The tension must not only be preserved, it must be tightened. As the play goes on, suspense must increase and the excitement grow. It is possible to draw the tension curve of a good play and plot it like a graph. If this is done the curve will be seen to rise

until it reaches a peak; the climax and end of the play.

In a short one-act play this rise of tension can rise steadily like a straight line from curtain to curtain, but this is unusual, and in longer plays at any rate it is necessary to have moments of relaxation. For one thing the nerves of the audience cannot stand the strain of uninterrupted tension, and fatigue will set in. This will show itself in a detachment which is really a form of self-protection. The only alternative is an hysterical laugh at the wrong moment. There are however other reasons for relaxing the tension. One is the need for contrast, which together with suspense, forms the basis of dramatic technique. Relaxation gives any subsequent heightening of tension an added effect, and as a general rule, the greater the height of tension desired, the greater the preceding relaxation ought to be. Each peak must be higher than the one before, and the lowest point of each relaxation must never sink to the lowest point of the previous relaxation.

The divisions of the Acts and Scenes have to be fitted into the tension curve. The play will start at a fairly low level and will rise in an ascending scale of interest-peaks up to a crisis which rings down the curtain. The next scene will begin at a more relaxed level, but at a higher point of tension than that of the opening of the play. This scene also will consist of a similar series of peaks up to another crisis. Finally the play will end soon after the last and highest peak of emotion which is called the climax. It is therefore a good idea to look for the most exciting moments of the story and use these as the crises which will end each scene, and this will help to settle the problem as to which incidents should be selected. The crises having been carefully chosen the incidents can be arranged to lead up to them.

Just over half the way through the play there is often a turning point. This is the moment when the direction of the play alters. It may not be at all obvious at the time, but at the end of the play one can often look back and remember it and say, "Ah it was there that the crucial step was taken that made the play end the way it did."

Playwrights all work in different ways. Some have orderly minds that start at the beginning and work straight forward until they reach the end. Others imagine snatches of dialogue and then work at connecting them together. A fruitful method is to start with a crisis or rather a character in a crisis and then ask two questions, namely "How did he get into this situation?" and "How is he going to get out of it?" The answers will lead you back to the preceding crisis and forward to the next one, and there will be no danger of your forcing your character to act in

a way unnatural to himself. It is not good to reason too much, it is better to look with the eye of imagination. Reason is good as a corrective, and as an aid when imagination fails, but reason too much relied upon can cause us to do violence to our characters. We do well to remember that we are not primarily rational creatures whatever certain philosophers may say. If we are patient enough to wait and look, the characters of our imagination will come alive and not allow their creator to make any such mistake.

Suggested Work

1. Choose a story and divide it up into Acts and Scenes, making a list of incidents you will include. Give each scene a title and indicate the nature of the crises that will ring down each curtain.
2. Work out a tension chart for *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 4.

THE HUMAN BRAIN AND THE LEARNING OF SECONDARY LANGUAGES[1]

By Wilder Penfield, O.M., M.D., F.R.S.

Canada and India have strong bonds of mutual understanding. We face common problems within and without. India is a land of many languages. Canada is a bilingual country. French is the mother tongue of the majority in the province of Quebec, where I live. It has been suggested that I should give two broadcasts on the subject of the "Human Brain and the Learning of Secondary Languages". But, I must confess at the outset, that I am a surgeon, not a school teacher. My life has been spent in the study of the nervous system and in an effort to treat its disorders.

The mind of man depends for its very existence upon the brain. There is no learning, no thinking, no conscious mental state that is not based on activity within the brain. No conscious act is possible, no word is spoken until thought can express itself in a pattern of nerve impulses within the brain, electrical impulses that travel swiftly outward along nerve fibres to the muscles to move them. This is not the time or place to discuss how nervous action is translated into thought, nor how it is that thought expresses itself in nerve impulse.

A consideration of the neurophysiological mechanisms of

[1] First Broadcast, New Delhi, February 1957, with kind permission of All-India Radio, (External Services).

speech should have its educational consequences. The human brain is man's master organ, and its control of speech is what chiefly distinguishes it from the brain of other mammals. Therefore, I would urge parents and educators to give some thought to this organ and how it learns languages. Perhaps they may discover why the teaching of secondary languages in schools, according to accepted curricular planning, is so much more laborious, so much less successful then the teaching of the primary tongue by mothers, or the teaching of secondary languages by servants and governesses in the home.

The brain of a boy in his teens is not the same as that of a child under ten, for the brain is not a machine like other machines. It is a living, growing, changing mechanism—the most complicated and astonishing of all mechanisms. During the earlier period the child is depositing, within the brain, language units which he will later utilize for all additions to his vocabulary. These are units of pronunciation and also of understanding. The unit is recorded in the nerve cells of the brain for use in that language immediately or at some later time. In later life he may expand his vocabulary from 300 to 10,000 words, for example, but he will probably pronounce all the words acquired at a later age in a manner that betrays the accent of his early teachers.

These original units are more than motor skills of tongue and lip; they are units of sound and units of thought established in a physical form within the brain. He uses these units over and over again while he is constructing the nerve-cell basis of each new word, and he deposits these word patterns in special areas of the cerebral cortex.

The cerebral cortex, as you know, is a rather thin layer of gray matter made up of nerve cells. The underlying white matter contains the nerve-cell fibres which run like long wires to other, more distant, nerve cells. The fibres have insulating coats so that they can carry active electrical impulses here and there.

Now if during the early period of life a child is in contact with people who speak other languages he will lay down language units of each of those secondary languages whether they are Hindi, English, Arabic or Chinese. And the few hundreds of words that he acquires early in each language may seem to be lost, but the speech units never. Even a less used language can be expanded later with relative ease.

A child who has heard only one language, and who approaches the second and third language later, employs the language units of his mother tongue for all the others. He is now in the stage or should be for expanding his vocabulary normally, and he tries to use the units of native Hindi, for example, when studying the

perplexing mysteries of the English tongue. All the rules of syntax and grammar in all the adult books or speech analysis are of little help to him.

The brain is now becoming inflexible as far as the beginning of a new language is concerned. It is rigid. The organ which once specialized in the acquisition of new language units has lost the art. It is now organized for the enlargement of vocabulary.

If proof is needed for this thesis, it may be found in the fact that when the speech area of an adult, which is located in a circumscribed portion of the left cerebral cortex, is destroyed by injury or disease, that unfortunate man may learn to speak again; but if the destroyed area was large he will never speak well. On the other hand, if a child under ten or twelve years of age suffers such an injury he also becomes completely speechless too, for a time. But at the end of a year he will be speaking again and speaking well. In order to do that he will have established new speech units and patterns in the language areas of the opposite hemisphere which was formerly the minor or non-dominant side. There is much greater flexibility of function in the child's brain.

It may be convenient for those who must plan the school curriculum to postpone the teaching of secondary languages until the second decade of life. But the plan will never do what we would like to have it do. It defies the laws of progressive change in the capacity of the brain.

Suppose a government were to pass a law that marriage must wait until the age of forty. Perhaps there might be certain reasonable and logical advantages for such a plan. Perhaps it might succeed if men and women were machines instead of living, growing, changing creatures. You will say that the law would be contrary to the nature of man. I would say the same of a school curriculum in which the teaching of secondary languages first makes its appearance at sixteen. Our laws and our edicts cannot alter human physiology.

For bilingual countries and for multilingual countries the learning of secondary languages is of the greatest importance. But it is of importance to other countries also. The curtains that shut off one nation from another and one ideology from another are not made of iron. They are made of words. Ignorance of secondary languages blinds us so that we cannot see through such curtains.

Each of the peoples of the world has its own peculiar way of life, its chosen ways of worship. These are internal matters. Self-determination is the very essence of liberty. Twenty years ago, Dr. Radhakrishnan said in his Oxford Lectures :—"Nothing

is good which is not self-chosen; no determination is valuable which is not self-determination."*

And yet no nation is sufficient unto itself. No language group within any country can live to itself alone. It is the secondary languages that open to us the thought and the culture of others, building thus a bridge to peace.

Without a secondary language we, in the West, could not have shared with you the wisdom and the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi. I think it is not too much to say that the people of the whole world are better for that man's example. But this applies especially to the nations of the Commonwealth, Britain along with the rest of us, and the United States no less.

The world has much to learn from India, especially in the realm of intellectual and spiritual tolerance. *For "the Hindu", to quote the words of Radhakrishnan once again, "the Hindu has acknowledged that truth wears many vestures of many colours and speaks in strange tongues."*

In my next broadcast I shall refer again to the speech mechanisms within the human brain and suggest how the mother's method of teaching might be employed in schools, without defying the laws of neurophysiology and without, it seems to me, increasing the total costs.

MUST EDUCATION INHIBIT THINKING?

BY A. G. STOCK

THE question sounds like a bad joke; but some ten years of university work have made me wonder whether we have not, in the examination system, accidentally hit upon the world's finest preventive against independent thought. It works by sifting the most intelligent boys and girls, from the secondary school onwards, through the graded sieves of the Matriculation, Intermediate and so forth, offering to the very best of them the prospect of emerging at last into the honourable lifelong security of the Public Services. From beginning to end of the process almost every one of them is convinced that his salvation depends on his ability to say, in the right words, whatever his examiners expect and will approve. Whether he himself either understands or means what he says is one of those irrelevant questions which are best shelved, at least till the examination is over, when it will matter less than ever.

The conviction may not be altogether correct. At least at the upper levels, if they only dared to risk it, a little intelligent,

* S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu Way of Life*, London, Macmillan, 1927.

independent thinking would probably be tolerated and even welcomed. But at the lower levels it is never expected and rarely encouraged, because it is too difficult to deal with in large classes working for large-scale examinations. By the time they have passed the B.A. the great majority of students have been so thoroughly conditioned by the system that they would hardly presume to express a judgment merely because they had thought about it and believed it to be true. They have mounted thus far by getting up appropriate answers to probable questions, and think it safer to continue in the same way. Knowing this, and shrinking from massacre, the M.A. examiner usually takes care to set a fair number of the probable questions and contents himself with a complaint in his report that "too few of the candidates make any attempt at critical thinking." And so it comes about that thinking is quietly eliminated from the educational process.

Nobody intends this to happen, but at the lower levels where the conditioning is done the process perpetuates itself. The student, like all students everywhere, is chiefly concerned to pass the examination as well as possible with the greatest economy of effort. If he can pass it without the kind of effort that would develop his mind, the fault is not his. Quite possibly the teacher would like to make him think for himself; but his first duty is to prepare him for the examination, and if experience tells him that dictated notes are the most successful way of doing this, he will dictate notes. The examiner works as a member of a large team, and in the name of equity he is bound to value the scripts by as mechanical a standard as possible since this is the only way to eliminate personal variations. If, for instance, he prefers an intelligent but chaotically expressed answer to one which is correct, but so stereotyped that it gives no evidence of the writer's understanding, he is likely to be asked by his Head to toe the general line. Then what about the question-setter? Is it not his responsibility to set a type of question and insist on a standard of marking which will give the intelligent thinker an advantage over the parrot? Possibly he would like to, but he wonders whether it is fair to examine the candidates on lines for which they are not prepared. And if he tries it, students and teachers will probably complain that he has "departed from standard" and public opinion in the form of the unsuccessful candidates' guardians will come out vigorously on their side. And so we go round and round.

And yet it is a generally accepted platitude that one of the major aims of education is to train the student to think effectively, and thus enable him to make a constructive contribution

to the world he lives in. Unfortunately good thinking comes in for too little specialist attention, since it belongs equally to all subjects and is less measurable than quantity of information or correctness of expression—things with which it is related but by no means identical. These are what we mostly take into account when we try to assess standards and techniques of teaching in our respective subjects. The teacher who values good thinking—and in spite of cynics there are many who do—is left to find out for himself how he can make room for it in class without lowering his pass percentage.

In English, which happens to be my subject, the problem is particularly difficult. For almost any kind of advanced work the student will have to be able to understand English accurately and also to think through it, which takes more than knowledge of the rules of grammar. In the early stages he has not much use for it, nor are the rudiments of any language intellectually stimulating; but there is a rather dreary examination which must be passed. In some schools and colleges, students spend a great deal of class-time in taking down answers they do not fully understand—since it is more practically important to get the answers right than to understand them—and expressing, by way of essay practice, sentiments which would never occur to them spontaneously on subjects they would not think about if they could help it, and in trying to memorise innumerable rules and exceptions. Even then they are not armed against disaster: at the Intermediate stage and later most of them, in spite of the teacher's efforts, are still capable of writing "he borned at Calcutta" or "I cannot meet my both ends," and get muddled over the gender of pronouns and the number of verbs.

In all this drill they have seldom had a chance of using the language for anything they really want to say. No wonder if English fails to capture their interest. This is where such teaching, however conscientiously done, seems to me to defeat itself. If the student genuinely wishes to express something he will begin of his own accord to think of the language as a medium of expression rather than as a meaningless accomplishment, and the teacher's work will begin to change from drill to guidance.

After all, if the proper use of language is to express thought, the procedure should as far as possible be from the thought to the words, not vice versa. As soon as he has a small vocabulary and few constructions the student should be trying to find words for what is in his head, even if his thoughts are not very profound, and the teacher should be helping him to find the right words. This means a good deal of oral practice, right from the beginning,

of a rather informal kind, not directly related to the examination. There are some teachers who seem to think that oral work is a waste of time, first because the students have a written examination to get through, and second because most of them will need to read and write English but will hardly need to speak it outside of the English lesson itself. There are also some who think that the only point of oral work is to teach good pronunciation, and doubt whether their own pronunciation is adequate.

I think this is a mistake. A good English accent is certainly an advantage, and ought to be cultivated by students and teachers of English. But what is more important is that speaking is easier and more natural than writing, and that even in his own language nearly everyone can express his thoughts better in speech. The technique of writing holds up thinking. If you want the students to use English easily, get them to say something of their own, even if it is only "May we have a holiday tomorrow?" to begin with. Get them to ask each other questions and find the answers. It is quite possible that the mere fact of being listened to attentively will make them improve the quality of what they say, and certainly the effort to follow each other's meaning will quicken understanding. The great thing is to give them confidence that they can use English as a means of saying what they think.

Oral work, however, is a preparation for writing but not a substitute for it. One of the difficulties of teaching written composition is that, since facility in language is very variable, the teacher is usually confronted with a mixed class, some of whom can write fairly fluently whereas others can hardly put two words together without a mistake. In oral work where each one says what he can, this does not matter so much, but if they are all asked to write the same essay the differences are hard to deal with. Yet it is important that the weakest student, no less than the most advanced, should discover how to put his own thoughts on paper. Here too, I suggest that the class will gain more from a few minutes' oral discussion among themselves than from an introductory lecture by the teacher, especially if the subject is one of those artificial, rather abstract topics like "India's Beggar Problem", on which ideas seldom bubble up spontaneously. The ideas may not be so coherent or so inclusive, but they are likely to be expressed with more varied phrasing, and in criticising one another's points the students will probably come to understand them better.

But is it necessary for everybody to write the same essay? Confronted with just such a varied group from the Third Year Class, I have found that a class magazine was the best answer.

The particular group I am thinking of numbered about twenty; the best was a young priest with a finished literary style and a classical education, the worst a barely literate boy from a remote village college, and there was almost every range of ability in between, not to mention considerable diversity of interests. We arranged for the magazine to come out fortnightly, using alternate meetings to discuss the contributions. The priest was appointed associate editor, and used to include a general survey and criticism of the issue in his editorial. This proved to be a good idea, because the contributors were more ready to argue with him than they would have been with me, which meant that they took more notice of the criticisms. Of the others, some wrote short stories (verse was discouraged because it had a way of running to bad grammar), the politically minded wrote topical controversial articles; some wrote letters for the correspondence column, and the weakest of all tried their hands at advertisements. Thus to begin with everyone found his own level. I corrected the grammar, typed out the successful articles in duplicate, bound one copy in the magazine and returned the other to the author to compare with his original. The game went very well indeed. Voluntary reporters began to write up public meetings—obviously an admirable exercise in substance-writing; an article on the need for a school course in World History produced a lively class debate; the advertisement writer promoted himself of his own accord to the correspondence column; somebody asked whether short stories that invariably ended in suicide were not a symptom of a defeatist mentality which ought to be discouraged. Altogether the zest of that class made it as good fun as any I have had the luck to teach.

The drawback, of course, was that the harder they worked the harder I had to work to keep up with them. One such group is stimulating, but two or three at a time would put an impossible strain on a teacher with a full programme. What called out their efforts was the fact that each was making an individual contribution and getting individual attention, and even the typescript played its part in enhancing the sense of the dignity of authorship.

Classes too large, teachers too few, inadequate supplies of books and journals, mass-scale examinations with too much depending on their results—all these are mentally deadening influences on education today, and we get nowhere by refusing to recognise them. When we recognise them, however, it becomes clear that they can best be counteracted by the individual teacher, using his ingenuity to stimulate the minds of groups of students in his particular subject. Admittedly he is working under terrific handicaps and cannot do everything; admittedly he will

probably get nothing for his efforts except the response of the students and a renewal of interest in his work. On the other hand nothing that he does will be wasted. He is working with individuals, and every individual who learns to make the best of his own mind is a positive gain to himself and to society.

DICTATION AS EAR TRAINING

BY F. L. BILLOWS

Education Officer, British Council, Madras

MOST PEOPLE use dictation as a method of testing, and by their marking of it show that it is spelling they are chiefly testing; some even say that they are teaching spelling when they give a dictation. But obviously they are not doing that unless they spell every word as they give it. The most they can be said to be doing is giving the pupil the opportunity of recalling the spelling of words he has previously learnt. Dictation is important because it relates what is spoken to what is written; it is not a method of teaching spelling, plenty of copying does that much better; it is not primarily a method of testing, though it may show us very clearly and quickly the different degrees of skill our pupils have in hearing accurately, retaining what is heard, and writing it down correctly. It is primarily a method of teaching, and it can be the most important item in the process of ear training. We are preparing for it orally when we say something to a pupil and ask him to recognize its meaning and respond to what we say in action, when we say "Please, clean the blackboard" and someone cleans it. We are continuing this preparation when we say a sentence and ask the pupil to repeat it. When the class can do this easily with the sentences of the lesson before last, it is ready to have a dictation, either in the actual words of that lesson or in the form of a piece made up from the words and structures of it.

If we regard dictation as primarily an exercise in ear training, we try to avoid distorting the pronunciation of words or syllables to make them more easily recognizable or easier to spell; we must also avoid over-emphasizing words or syllables which are not normally emphasized. But if we read only phrases, and these abnormally slowly, this is not easy. It is, therefore, advisable, as far as possible, to read complete sentences only, at almost normal speaking speed, so that the rhythm and intonation are easy to keep near to normal speech. The ear is thus given genuine practice in catching and holding normally spoken

sentences. Of course this means that we have to select pieces containing sentences of suitable length for the class, so a good plan is to make up one's own dictations out of the vocabulary and structures of a lesson done not long before, until the pupils are used to this kind of dictation. Sentences may gradually be increased in length; many teachers who have not tried this technique may be surprised how their pupils' capacity for attentive listening can increase in a few months of such work done regularly, say, two or three times a week. An example of one way to increase the difficulty of dictation within the capacity of the pupil might be a dictation such as the following: "We get up in the morning. We come to school at ten o'clock. We work from ten till one o'clock then we go home. We come to school again at two o'clock. We work till four o'clock. We read and write and answer questions. We go home at four o'clock. We go to bed in the evening at nine or ten o'clock." A week or so later we may give virtually the same dictation, but increase the length of the sentences. "We all get up in the morning. Some of us get up at five o'clock, but others later, at six or even seven o'clock. We usually come to school at ten o'clock, but on Saturdays and Sundays we do not come to school. We have 4 lessons between ten and one o'clock. Some of us go home for an hour from one till two o'clock; others play in the playground", etc. The piece can be given once more a few weeks later, with further refinements and complexities.

When giving a dictation I only read a sentence once because my pupils will have to get used to hearing and understanding ordinary speech in which sentences are seldom repeated; so I want to give them practice in catching a sentence the first time they hear it, and holding it in their minds long enough to write it down. I want their skill in doing this to increase steadily, but I do not want them to despair if they find it at first difficult. I want to help those who need help to remember what they have half forgotten, and in this way I try to show them how to train their memories. As soon as I have said a sentence I go round the class seeing who has written the sentence correctly, whispering or writing a word if a boy is held up, or correcting a word that is wrong. I may tell a boy who has written the sentence correctly to go and help a boy who has written it wrong or is uncertain what to write. If I find that several members of the class have misheard a particular word and written it wrong, I ask the class to decide whether it is correct or whether in fact I said something else. If several have written it right we get a chorus of the right word from all sides. Then we discuss the word to bring out its meaning and fix it in the pupils' memory. When I am satisfied

that all who can write the sentence have written it, I ask a boy who has written it correctly to read it out. Then we all repeat the sentence until everybody feels he knows it and can understand it. If anyone still finds it difficult, others try to say the sentence in other words or remind him of similar sentences they have met before. By the time we have finished we may have repeated the sentence a dozen or more times and it will have been brought to full consciousness. In all this work the element of co-operation and mutual help is strong.

I usually ask one boy who has good, clear handwriting to write his dictation on the blackboard. Anyone can copy his version who wants to, but if we are seriously trying to train the class in habits of responsibility for their own work and in self-respect; if we are showing boys how to judge and improve their own work; if we treat mistakes as things to be corrected and overcome and not as moral delinquency; if each boy sees that he has a stake in his own improvement, he will not copy the blackboard version until he has admitted to himself that he has failed to remember the sentence himself. Besides this, it will soon become clear that the boy writing on the blackboard is not infallible; and, in fact, a howl of delight or good-tempered derision, if he makes a mistake, is a healthier form of correction than the teacher's and helps all members of the class to look at their own work critically. When the sentence is corrected the blackboard version is corrected by a boy who has written it correctly in his book, and all versions are corrected to agree with it, as we go along. This ensures that mistakes are not left in front of the eyes longer than necessary, and also saves time.

When we have finished a paragraph and corrected it there are various things we can do. We can tell the class to write a second paragraph in their own words and give the whole piece a title. This aids, completes and tests comprehension. Another possibility is to get several members of the class to read the piece through in turn; then we can rub out every fifth word and read it through again filling in the missing words from memory. After that we rub out every fourth, every third, every second and finally all the remaining words successively, reading the piece through again and again until there is nothing left on the blackboard. That is, it has moved from the blackboard into the minds of the pupils. They have absorbed the sentence patterns and words in their relationships, and whenever they read the piece over its meaning will come to them again, complete and unhindered. At this point, or as an alternative to the possibilities just outlined, the class can be divided up into groups under the leadership of those who were most successful in getting the sentences written

down right, and the group leaders can dictate the same dictation again to those who found it difficult. Or this exercise can be an alternative for the weaker pupils, to continuing the story—or writing another paragraph—in their own words. One good way of continuing the dictation is for individual members of the class to continue the story, each giving—i.e. dictating—a sentence.

A teacher need never be afraid of giving the same piece of dictation more than once, but, of course, when giving it a second time he should read it faster than the first time and he will probably cut out the discussion and the writing on the blackboard. In general the teacher should choose for dictation pieces that are worth learning by heart or at least becoming very familiar with, in the earlier stages for the value of the pattern sentences and useful turns of phrase contained in them, and later for their interest and beauty. No teacher need adopt exclusively one mode of giving dictation; the kind I have described need not supersede or exclude the kind we are more familiar with, and vice versa. Sometimes we can dictate in one way and sometimes in another; one way will suit some teachers better than another. Above all, to preserve spontaneity, the teacher should constantly experiment with now this technique and now that, bearing in mind what results he hopes to achieve in successful training of the ear, co-ordinating hand and ear, building up impressions of sentence patterns in the mind, penetrating into the heart of a piece of prose, and so on. All these can be achieved through dictation, but the teacher may sometimes prefer to concentrate on one aim rather than on another.

REVIEWS

Leadership in Educational Administration,
Chitra Naik, Publications Branch, Govt. of India,
Civil Lines, New Delhi

STARTING with the assumption that bureaucratic thought and practice before Independence was entirely out of harmony with the needs and the democratic development of the people, the author tries to show that the new type of educational administrator must be a leader who knows how to delegate responsibility, yet realizes that he must be constantly alert to see that this responsibility is competently discharged. He tells a few pleasant stories of educational administrators who were able by tactful behaviour and sympathy for village communities to get schools built and arouse more interest in the schools and education. His advice, if taken, would no doubt bring about a revolution in education,

and fundamentally alter the attitude of the community towards its servants—the educational administrators; fortunately, in case anyone should doubt the inevitability of the miracle, he is able to reassure us that this revolution took place automatically, in many areas, with the coming of Independence.

Government of India Scholarships—or Studies in India, Publications Branch, Govt. of India, Delhi

THIS BROCHURE gives in convenient form, information about educational opportunities in India for Indian and foreign students who might not otherwise be able to afford it. It gives details of the schemes for increasing the number of trained engineers, scientists and technicians in the country through scholarships; it tells of scholarships for the blind and the deaf, for the scheduled and backward castes and merit scholarships for the Public Schools, to ensure that the most promising children from the lower income groups have an opportunity to benefit by this type of education. The second part of the book gives information about scholarships for foreign nationals to study in India.

Integrated Courses in Social Studies, R. D. Bramwell, Publications Branch, Govt. of India, Delhi

MR. BRAMWELL spent 2½ months in India early in 1956 and ran refresher courses in Social Studies for teachers and trainers of teachers in Bombay, Madras and Delhi. This brochure is a summary of the lectures he gave. He shows how the education of children through problem-solving and personal investigation of problems in connection with the work of the world around them, is more effective and economical of effort, and produces a more responsible and enterprising citizen, than telling them the results of other people's investigations and collecting and predigesting all kinds of information for them. He shows that the process of collecting and organizing the knowledge is as valuable as the knowledge itself, but also the knowledge is rendered far more memorable in the process.

Project work need not be confined to the teaching of social studies, English learning can be made more interesting and compelling if projects are carried out in English; reporting in English, the display of exhibits with captions in English, the drawing of charts with English explanations, and then explaining the exhibition in English to those who visit it, are all useful and interesting ways of using the language. But even a social studies' project

carried out in the Regional Language can spill over into English, in that certain references and some printed material collected in the course of the project may well be in English; in this way pupils in high schools may be shown how the use of English can profitably supplement the work they do in the Regional Language.

Educational Forum—Reading Number

Educational Forum is a quarterly issued by the Department of Extension Service of the Central Institute of Education in Delhi, with the aim of promoting the course of secondary education in the country in general and in Delhi in particular. The current number is devoted to studies in Reading. The articles are interesting and practical, based on recent psychological investigations.

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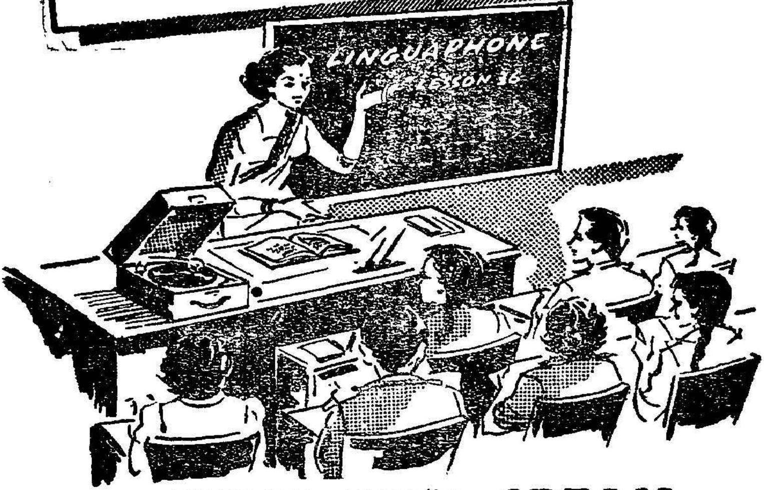

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